DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 074 556 CS 500 212

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TITLE Intercultural Communication Research: Where Do We Go from Here?
PUB DATE Nov 72
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Assn. (Honolulu, November 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Factors; *Culture Contact; Information Utilization; Research Criteria; Research Methodology; *Research Needs; *Research Proposals; Social Relations

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an outline of intercultural communication research needs and offers proposals for research direction for the next decade. The author suggests the following goals and criteria: (1) extend existing theory to encompass intercultural communication; (2) concentrate on intercultural research rather than cross-cultural research; (3) find the social and psychological conditions requisite to successful intercultural contact; (4) determine the effects intercultural communication has on participants; (5) study information diffusion in other cultures; and (6) catalogue culturally determined patterns of communicative behavior. In view of the growing importance of intercultural communication and the increasing challenges of greater interaction among men, the author asserts that it is the responsibility of intercultural communication researchers to provide the knowledge and understanding necessary for meeting those challenges. (LG)

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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH:

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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Presented to the

Western Speech Communication Association Convention

Honolulu, Hawaii

November, 1972

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Introduction

Intercultural communication increasingly has become a matter of vital interest and importance in the last fifteen years. Domestic events in the sixties focused our attention on communicative behaviors that in many cases were strange and did not conform to our usual expectations. Mario Savio, Huey Newton, Malcolm X, Timothy Leary and others became highly visible and vocal, and they disturbed us. Many of us often had difficulty comprehending their views or even understanding them. Simultaneously, contact with people from more distant cultures increased. Perhaps we had international students in our classrooms, traveled to foreign countries, or encountered foreign visitors at home. As with our domestic experiences, we frequently discovered communication difficulties: apparent and perhaps undefined barriers that impeded effective communication. Both domestic and international intercultural encounters sometimes left us confused, unable to understand why our communication skills failed us.

With the appearance of Hall's The Silent Language in the early sixties, we came to recognize the influence culture has on the entire communication process. Interest began to develop in intercultural communication, and as social events unfolded around us this interest quickened to a flury of activity. Books and studies appeared on such diverse subjects as the cultural aspects of communication in Asia (Oliver, 1962, 1971), foreign visitors' perceptions of the United States (Wedge, 1964), the rhetoric of agitation (Bosmajian and Bosmajian, 1970; Bowers and Ochs, 1971), Black rhetoric (Smith, 1969, 1972; Smith and Robb, 1971; Scott and Brockriede, 1970), and communication patterns among the urban poor (Dervin, 1970; Williams, 1970; Dervin and Greenberg, 1972). Special interest groups developed, as evidenced by your presence here today, by the Intercultural Communication Interest Group of the International Communication Association, and by the emphasis given intercultural communication by

the Speech Communication Association. Graduate theses investigated intercultural communication specifically (Watson, 1968; Holiday, 1971) and generally by reviewing, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing literature (Ekroth, 1967; Porter, 1968). Now, books fully devoted to the communicative aspects of intercultural interaction have appeared (Hoopes, 1971; Samovar and Porter, 1972; Gorden, n.d.) or are under preparation (Prosser, 1972, p. 66) as texts suitable for undergraduate and graduate level courses in intercultural communication.

Perhaps our most important discovery is the realization that a great deal of knowledge about intercultural communication exists, but it is fragmented and scattered widely. Little attempt has been made to gather and synthesize what is known into a coherent body of useful and related material. Even less effort has been invested in developing a theoretical basis for the study of intercultural communication.

Now, I believe, it is time to assess our position and to think about and plan research that will remove the gaps in our knowledge, gather the existing literature into a coherent body of theoretical and practical knowledge, and lead us to understanding and control of intercultural communication. We must define our goals in terms of our purposes for studying intercultural communication and plan the research necessary to attain our goals. As a step toward developing a guide and framework for investigating intercultural communication, I am proposing research directions for the next decade. The proposals include guiding criteria as well as specific goals.

Intercultural communication research criteria

The following six criteria are set forth as general guides or frameworks within which I believe intercultural communication research should be conducted. They are not specific goals but are limiting parameters for the planning of intercultural communication research projects.

1. Intercultural communication research should contribute to our understanding of the role culture plays in influencing communicative behavior. An important basis for such research is a conceptualization of intercultural communication. I suggest it be viewed within the universal statement that communication is what occurs whenever meaning is attributed to behavior. Intercultural communication is subsumed in this universe of communication, and we may locate it by the statement intercultural communication occurs whenever meaning is attributed to behavior coming from another culture. I have chosen this view because it allows us to include for examination all cultural aspects of behavior that may function as messages. In this sense, a message is any behavior to which meaning may be attributed.

This conceptualization does not limit us to particular aspects of the intercultural communication process. We are free to consider language and linguistics, world view, the influence of prejudices and stereotypes, social roles and role prescriptions, nonverbal behaviors, emotional expression, the use and organization of time and space, social structure, and so on through an almost endless list. I also suggest this conceptual framework because it is suitable for both scientific methodologies and humanistic approaches to the study of human communication. Whether researchers are seeking to empirically verify the existence of a cultural variation in communicative behavior or seeking to apply Burke's (1967) theory of consubstantiation and identity to persuasion as it occurs within or between various cultures does not matter. The framework allows for both. In fact, its flexibility even allows for such esoteric views of communication as a submolecular systems or an interterrestrial systems approach.

2. Intercultural communication research should be conducted within an existing theoretical framework. If we want our investigations to be applicable

beyond the immediate event, our research must support the development of theories that account for and explain intercultural communicative behavior. We must work within a structure that leads to the building, refinement, and modification of our theories rather than to the satisfaction of random curiosity. Consequently, our research should be planned and conducted so our ideas, constructs, and hypotheses are derived from theoretical frameworks.

3. The development of a systematic and coherent explanation of human communication must include every aspect of the communication situation. Whether it be intrapersonal or intercultural, a complete and viable theory must consider and account for all happenings. Our research must seek to develop this ability by extending existing communication and rhetorical theories to the intercultural situation. Our existing body of theory was developed primarily in intracultural situations, and except for occassional cross-cultural comparisons, has not been systematically applied to the intercultural setting. We may understand the theory of cognitive dissonance, but the further development of communication theory requires, of course, that we discover how dissonance is produced in all cultures.

4. Working within a theoretical framework and extending existing theory to the intercultural situation has an inherent danger. We must not be trapped by what Kaplan (1964) has called the "Law of the Hammer." Briefly, the "Law of the Hammer" states that if you give a small child a hammer, everything it encounters will need pounding. This sometimes has been our problem; we attempt to explain everything with one theory. When intercultural communication was first recognized as a problem area, there was wide acceptance of the idea that if we learned the linguistic structure of the other language, then we would be able to communicate effectively. When we discovered that mastery of another culture's linguistic structure did not ensure communication, we began to scrap linguistic theory in favor of cultural values. This movement holds that if we

learn the value system of another culture, effective communication will then be possible. But, since this alone does not work, suggestions to scrap the cultural value system approach are appearing.

We must avoid the "Law of the Hammer" belief that any phenomena as complex and diverse as intercultural communication can be adequately explained by a single theory or a single approach. We must realize that human behavior can only be understood through a multiple theory framework and not discard an entire theoretical approach because it fails to solve all problems or to explain everything. Instead, this should signal us that our theory needs additional work and integration into a more encompassing theoretical framework. One, for instance, that joins linguistic structure with cultural values, world views, and other cultural influences on meaning eliciting behavior.

5. We should concern ourselves with intercultural communication on both the domestic and international levels. Some of us perceive intercultural communication as international and ignore or fail to be aware of the polycultural make-up of our own society. We must not only concern ourselves with communication between Americans and Japanese or Chinese or Russians, we must give a large share of our attention to the intercultural communication in our own communities. Black, Chicano, Oriental, Indian, and Anglo cultures have great variations and pose many communication problems for which we must find solutions.

6. Research should ultimately lead to the development of methods for teaching and improving intercultural communication skills. Communication is a complex set of behaviors by which individuals are linked. But these behaviors can be learned, unlearned, improved, and practiced. As professionals in the field of speech communication, we have a propriatory interest in the improvement of communication. In fact, in many ways, this is what distinguishes from others

in the behavioral sciences and humanities. If we are to satisfy this interest in and tradition of improving communication skills, then we must develop the means of teaching necessary behaviors.

Goals for intercultural communication research

Extending existing theory to intercultural communication.-- Specified earlier was the research criteria of operating within a theoretical framework and extending existing theory. This should also be an actual goal. We must extend existing communication and rhetorical theory to intercultural communication events to determine how cultural frames of reference relate to our theory. We know of such communication elements as source, encoding, message, code, channel, decoding, receiver, response, noise, feedback, et cetera. But, we need to determine how these variables function in other cultures or when interactors are from different cultures.

There are a number of theories employing the concept of psychological balance or consistency to explain persuasion and attitude change. Rearrangement of cognitive structure due to psychological inconsistency is surely trans-cultural. But the sets of cognitions generally perceived as inconsistent are not trans-cultural. We know that thought processes, patterns of reasoning, and social structure are but a few of the cultural influences that can determine psychological balance. But, before we can understand the induction of cognitive inconsistency in minds patterned by other cultures, we must first understand how that mind functions.

Intercultural vs. cross-cultural research.--Our research must focus on intercultural rather than cross-cultural situations. Although cross-cultural comparisons reveal differences between cultures and give us insights about intercultural communication, this alone is insufficient; we must investigate speech communication situations where interpersonal relations occur between

members of different cultures. Our research designs must provide for the observation of intercultural interactions in the settings within which intercultural communication normally occurs. We have closely observed intercultural communication among students drawing from the readily available international student populations on our campuses. But this is an extremely limited arena. We need to expand into other areas if we are to offer any significant societal service. Businessmen engaged in international trade are specific persons in need of intercultural communication knowledge and training. What problems of organization and communication do they face as they set up offices in other countries? Even if we ignore such political problems as keeping the shadow of capitalism low-keyed in the Soviet Union, how do Americans learn about, recognize, and solve their normal communication problems with Russians or Chinese, or Latin Americans?

Requisite conditions for intercultural communication.--Intercultural communication research should seek and verify the requisite conditions for intercultural communication. Operating in the United States today is a strong social force that supports school integration by forced bussing and other means. This position is based on the assumption that interracial and intergroup contact within schools and classes will enable children to know each other better, reduce ethnic prejudice and intergroup tensions, and improve relations between the various ethnic groups and classes. However we may applaud such a goal, we need to evaluate the basis of this and other such assumptions upon which forced intercultural communication encounters may be based. Amir (1969), in reviewing the available literature on this subject, has stated "there is much evidence indicating that intergroup contact does not necessarily reduce intergroup tension or prejudice and that it may even increase tension and cause violent outbreaks, racial riots, and slaughter" (p. 30). Amir's findings make it paramount for

us to discover the characteristics of situations where contact does work and learn how to create those conditions. We cannot proceed blindly on the assumption that intercultural communication will succeed if we can just get together.

Effects of intercultural communication on participants.--What happens to participants during and after intercultural communication? How does intercultural contact affect the social perceptual frame of reference? What effects do a source's perceptions of different cultures have on his communication transactions with that country or culture? What happens to a person's future behavior if after an intercultural communication experience he develops an empathic feeling for the manner in which another sees the world? What factors in individuals are associated with empathic ability, and what means can be employed to increase this ability? What happens to the Anglo who has come to understand why a Black may refer to a policeman as a "pig"? What about his future behavior when he encounters another who vehemently denounces the Black's insulting of the "law and order forces." What happens to the thought processes? How do intercultural experiences affect personality characteristics? This area is one that currently is merely a list of questions we must deal with. Our knowledge is terribly lacking in this important aspect of communication.

Information diffusion in other cultures.--A continuing need earlier pointed out by Becker (1969) is to understand the ways in which information is diffused in various cultures. What channels are preferred for what types of communication? What codes are preferred and used? We must discover and thoroughly understand those unique diffusion institutions within each culture if we are to intelligently plan intercultural communication or even to understand it when it occurs. Perhaps Schramm's (1948) model of WHO communicates WHAT through WHICH channel to WHOM with what EFFECT would be an appropriate

guide for investigating this area. Presently we are very limited in this knowledge, especially in the domestic area. Holiday (1971) has pioneered this area with his work in the Chicano community of Los Angeles. But so much more needs to be accomplished.

Cataloging culturally determined patterns of communicative behavior.-- Many aspects of human behavior that vary culturally have been identified. For instance, we know differences in social structure, hierarchial systems and patterns of loyalties, linguistic structures, nonverbal behaviors, proxemics, time, philosophic orientations, and emotional expressions are culturally determined, and that these variations affect intercultural communication. There are many anecdotal records of communication difficulties which have occurred because of these differences. As a case in point, a British professor precipitated a student demonstration at Ain Shams University in Cairo in 1952 when he leaned back in his chair and put his feet up on the desk while talking to his class. What he did not realize is in the Middle East it is extremely insulting to have to sit facing the soles of someone's shoes (Yousef, 1972, p. 4).

Unfortunately, there are few available resources where the communicative behaviors peculiar to a specific culture are listed and described. The available material is widely scattered through an enormous collection of books and journals. We know wide differences do exist in cultural patterns of communicative behavior, but we often only have vague suspicions what differences may exist. Hall (1959, 1966), for instance, has told of proxemic differences between Latin Americans and North Americans in face-to-face interaction. But he has not specified what these differences are or how great they may be. Nor, for that matter, do we know if they really inhibit intercultural communication. And, are they the same for all Latins or do Colombians act differently than Costa Ricans? Are these patterns

consistent across socio-economic levels or do they vary? These questions need to be investigated thoroughly before we can develop prescriptive advice about intercultural communication.

To the satisfaction of this research goal, I suggest we compile the relevant communicative behaviors of various cultures into clear and concise intercultural catalogs. The efforts of the Language Research Center at Brigham Young University to establish an intercultural communication data bank is a step in this most necessary direction. Also, Gorden's American Guests in Colombian Homes: A Study in Cross-Cultural Communication. can serve us as a guide. Here such important but often overlooked aspects as the use of upstairs versus downstairs areas, bathroom patterns, bedroom uses, breakfast time, and the sharing of television sets are detailed and described. Such obvious influencing cultural factors as roles and role relationships, linguistic differences, and social structures are discussed. In satisfying this goal, we must carefully distinguish between cultural behaviors that significantly affect intercultural communication and those that are different and interesting but have little affect on communication outcomes. Here, of course, lies the need for empirical research that will test these differences in intercultural situations and determine their influence on intercultural communication.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined rather briefly what I perceive to be the immediate needs in intercultural communication research. Having established six guiding criteria for the research, I propose six general goals this research should accomplish. In brief they are (1) extending existing theory to intercultural communication, (2) concentrating on intercultural research rather than cross-cultural research, (3) finding the social and psychological conditions requisite

to successful intercultural contact, (4) determining the effects intercultural communication has on participants, (5) studying information diffusion in other cultures, and (6) cataloging culturally determined patterns of communicative behavior.

These goals are sufficient to foster much rich and needed communication research during the next decade. The importance of intercultural communication is growing rapidly, and if man expects to meet the challenges of greater interaction, we must provide the knowledge and understanding to help meet that challenge. This is our job, our duty, and our responsibility.

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